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SUBJECT: COMOROS AWAITS AU DECISION ON MILITARY OPTIONS

REF: ANTANANARIVO 595 AND PREVIOUS

¶11. (U) With "President" Bacar of Anjouan refusing to hold new island presidential elections sanctioned by the international community, South Africa is reportedly organizing an urgent meeting of regional foreign ministries and an official from the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council June 19 in Cape Town. AU officials in Moroni informed us the AU Peace and Security Council will base their decision over whether to expand their force's mandate in Comoros to include military options and disarmament (which would require a separate meeting) on the outcome of the June 19 talks. The second round of elections in Grande Comore and Moheli are set to take place June 24, but Union government officials have agreed not to speculate on a new date for elections in Anjouan until the AU makes a decision. Embassy Antananarivo will be sending two American officers and one local employee to observe the run-off island election on Grande Comore June 24.

¶12. (U) In a nationwide address June 16, Union President Ahmed Abdallah Sambi cautioned the citizens of the Comoros that the Union Government -- with the agreement of the African Union, the Arab League and many members of the international community -- may be turning to "another option" [read: military] after the failure of exhaustive diplomatic negotiations with Anjouan. President Sambi warned, "Colonel Mohamed Bacar will assume the consequences of his stubbornness to defy the institutions of the Union of the Comoros." Free and fair elections will be held in Anjouan in the coming days "with or without their assent, at a date fixed by us," and Anjouan will be disarmed. Condemning Bacar's "rebellious behavior," Sambi indicated that future leaders can only come to power through democratic means and not by wielding weapons.

¶13. (SBU) Meanwhile, "President" Bacar continues to prepare for a showdown on Anjouan. His forces can be seen on alert around town, at the port, and along the coast. Human rights NGOs report his militia is arming unwilling young people with weapons, telling them, "In case the foreign forces come, you must be ready to fight." Bacar reportedly bought all of the stores out of knives to arm the residents of his village. One contact reported 10 to 20 young anti-Bacar citizens in the capital city of Mutsamudu are considering attacking Bacar's forces with weapons left behind by Union army soldiers following the May 2 melee (reftels).

¶4. (U) COMMENT: Comorans welcomed President Sambi's firmer tone. Sambi is apparently emboldened by the AU's willingness to reconvene the Peace and Security Council, but he will need a favorable decision in order to deliver on his threats. Security contacts report Bacar has approximately 800 armed elements commanded by his brother Abdou, including 150 gendarmes, 100 former military personnel, and 550 "militia" -- a considerable challenge for the poorly equipped Union forces. END COMMENT.

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